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ABSTRACT

This report examines the teaching of history in Scottish primary (elementary) and secondary schools and sets an agenda for further research. The research findings include: (1) Scotland may be the only country in the world, and certainly in Europe, that does not require its youngsters to study its history; (2) the introduction of Modern Studies in 1962 and its growth over the past 30 years gradually has weakened the status of history in the secondary schools; and (3) history is not in a very strong position in the schools due to many conflicting interests and requirements. More research is called for and the paper sets forth questions that could be addressed in the future. (EH)

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The Teaching of History in Scottish Schools since 1945: A Progress Report

By: Martin Feldman

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The Teaching of History in Scottish Schools since 1945: A Progress Report

Introduction

The first thing I will have to do is to give you some personal details about myself. I moved to Scotland in 1973 to take up a post in the Modern Studies Department at Jordanhill College of Education which, at that time, was the largest teachers' college in Europe. Over the past year or two, I have begun to look at the teaching of history in the primary (elementary) and secondary schools in Scotland. I have narrowed the time period down to the years beginning in 1945. I'll return to this point later.

My interest in this project was partly related to my training as a historian and partly due to a long interest in the history of American education and education in general. My interest was further stimulated by reading the works of Ivor Goodson in the United Kingdom and Barry Franklin in the United States. However, the time in which curriculum history really took off was when I left for Scotland and in many ways this has been a bit of a problem because I've had to read widely in order to make up for lost time and unfamiliar material.

Before I begin my brief survey of what I have uncovered so far, I feel I must point out first a few key facts about Scotland and Scottish education. An article I wrote for Social Education in October 1988 would be a very good place to begin for those who are interested in this subject.

Scotland

Scotland is a nation in feeling and belief, if not in political terms. Several weeks ago, an English friend who lives in London and is a sophisticated, worldly person and has travelled quite a bit throughout the world, came up to visit us at our home in Glasgow. At that time, while we were having coffee, he commented that whenever he visited Scotland, or Glasgow in particular, he felt as if he was in a foreign country. This, I think, really says a great deal about Scotland as a nation. If one looks at the history of Scotland and the unification of Scotland as it became part of the United Kingdom, this is an extremely interesting story. In 1603 there was the union of the crowns in which the English and Scottish kings joined together and a new king was placed on the throne of the two countries, James VI of Scotland became James I of the United Kingdom. In 1707, there was the union of the two parliaments which resulted in the elimination of the parliament in Scotland. To this very day, historians still debate the nature of how this union came about. The question has been raised over and over again as to whether or not Scotland was "sold down the river" by a group of Scottish nobility who were trying to improve their status. A famous song by Robert Burns, the national poet of Scotland, entitled "A Parcel of Rogues" makes the point very clearly as Burns definitely uses the term "parcel of rogues' to indicate the Scottish nobility. To this very day there is a debate on this issue.

Yet, in spite of the fact that it became part of the United Kingdom, which is Northern Ireland, England, Wales and Scotland, Scotland has retained three

things which are the key elements which make up a nation. First, it has its own established church, the Church of Scotland. Second, it has its own separate legal system. This means that if anyone wishes to practice law in Scotland they must take a Scottish law degree which equips them to practice in Scotland. This does not allow them to practice in England. And the final key feature is, and perhaps most most important to us, that Scotland has retained its own educational system.

Scottish Education

So let us now look at Scottish education. It is definitely not the same as English education. Many of the recent changes in curriculum, assessment, funding and management of schools in England have not been put into practice in Scotland in spite of attempts by the government to implement these policies. Scotland has a long tradition of excellence in education and a long history of government or local government involvement in the support of education, much, much before England. For example, in the 1450s and 1460s three universities were established in Scotland: St. Andrews, Glasgow and Aberdeen. In 1496 the Scottish parliament passed an act which attempted to set up primary schools and try to make a certain amount of schooling compulsory. In the 1560s, during the Protestant Reformation, John Knox set out a proposal for a national system of schools beginning at the age of 5 and going right through university. In 1696, the Scottish parliament passed a law setting up schools in each parish and in many ways this law seems similar to other acts in the New England colonies in the United States during the 1640s.

If we examine the Social Studies, since this is the focus of this conference, there is no such thing as Social Studies in Scottish schools. In 1995 there are still separate departments in the secondary schools for History, Geography, Economics and Modern Studies. There are separate Heads of Departments and separate external exams offered in each subject. As for Modern Studies, it is a new subject, introduced only in 1962. It concentrates and analyses current issues through an inter-disciplinary approach and it has had a tremendous impact on the teaching of social subjects in Scotland and has grown greatly in popularity. It also has been "radical" and innovative in many aspects and I'll come back to that later in the paper.

Scottish education is highly centralised, yet there has been a strong partnership between the Scottish Office Education Department and local authorities. School begins in Scotland at the age of five and primary school runs from five years to twelve years. The secondary school begins at the age of twelve and is primarily a neighbourhood school with compulsory attendance until sixteen years of age. Interestingly, from an American standpoint, there is no such thing as graduation. Pupils leave school at the age of sixteen if they wish. External exams were established in 1888, mainly to provide a certain amount of order to a wide range of schools and curricula which had developed over the years and also to help with entrance to universities. The Scottish Leaving Certificate exams were instituted in that year and the results and the general teaching arrangements were designed to help in the inspection of schools and to provide uniform standards and evaluation. The impact of external exams in the secondary school

programme has been tremendous. In 1988 a new exam, the Standard Grade, was introduced. This exam was to be taken at the end of fourth year of secondary school and was to cover the third and fourth year of teaching in each particular subject. Third and fourth year would be approximately fourteen to sixteen years of age. The Higher exam was to be taken at the end of fifth year and was followed by what was termed a Sixth Year Study. Both of these exams were primarily taken by a small number of pupils, approximately 30%. These exams were aimed at those pupils who were planning to go on to attend higher education and the Scottish Highers are required for entrance to a Scottish university.

Research Findings

Now, let's look at my research so far. After much thought and discussion with various people throughout the country, I decided that 1945 was to be the starting point of the research. The reasons for this are several. First, that date marked the end of the war and the establishment of the first Labour government. Second, changes in curricula and organisation for the schools in Scotland, which had been postponed by the war, were to be introduced in 1946 and therefore it was a good place to begin since many changes were to take place. Finally, and perhaps most important, there are still people alive who taught during these years and it is these people that I would like to contact, speak with, and gain insight into the teaching of History during these years.

Yet, in order to get a true feel of the situation and considering I was not brought up in this system and did not know all that much about it, I find I have spent a great deal of time reading about the period 1900-1945 and therefore much of what I will say this afternoon is based upon what I have found out about that period.

I have set out a series of questions which I hope to use as a framework for research. These questions are as follows:

a) What was the amount of History required in primary and secondary schools? (The hours per week or time over a year.)

b) Was History taught in a chronological or topical approach?

c) What were the major topics studied in primary school? In secondary school?

d) Was a biographical or "great persons" approach used?

e) What Scottish history was taught? What topics/periods from Scottish history were taught?

f) What types of textbooks were used? Were they political history or social and economic history?

g) Were supplementary materials available? (Pictures, film strips, film, etc.)

h) Were attempts made to integrate Scottish history with Scottish literature?

i) What training or requirements were demanded of History teachers?

I hope to examine teaching in both primary and secondary schools. In many ways secondary school is much simpler to study because the external exams often outlined the syllabus and set out boundaries. Primary school becomes more complicated, mainly because there were often locals and sometimes an individual curriculum in various schools.

So, what have I found so far? These findings are mainly from the years preceding 1945. I have found much that is fascinating and very, very different from my experiences and knowledge of education in the United States. First, History was not a significant subject in the school curriculum, and remember, we are talking History and not Social Studies.

If we examine the primary schools, much that is interesting can be found. First, History was taught as a separate subject along with Geography and sometimes Nature Studies, which was a mixture of science and a study of the local environment. As late as 1950, History was assigned one hour per week in the curriculum. In 1965, a radical new document called The Primary Memorandum was introduced in Scotland. This was a document of its times and one must remember that the Plowden Report was issued in England two years later. This Report still dominates much of the child-centred approach found in Scottish primary schools. It introduced a new term in Scottish education, "environmental studies", which was to be an integrated subject and include History, Geography, Science, Environmental Education combined in one complete topic area. In the History syllabus, topics were biographical in the early stages of primary school and in the later years they centred mainly upon the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. There was very little Scottish history taught, apart from "Bonnie Prince Charlie" and "the Jacobite Rising in 1745". The textbooks were chronological, dull and poorly illustrated. In the secondary schools, things were very much the same. Until 1973, the school-leaving age was fifteen. Allied to the selective nature of the secondary schools, most pupils did very little History before they left school. Even the pupils who stayed on at secondary school were not required to study History, nor did they have to study History if they went to university.

Almost from the introduction of the external exams in 1888, History was not an important or required subject. For most of the time from 1888 to 1946, History was often a section of the English exam paper and was minimal in its content. Attempts were made to offer History as a separate exam paper from 1909 to 1914 but the war affected the progress and, along with negative attitudes towards the subject, this experiment failed and throughout all of the inter-war years History remained in a weak position. In 1939, the decision was made that History should become a separate exam, but due to World War II, this was not implemented until 1946/47. Throughout the period to 1945, inspectorate reports almost always criticised the teaching of History, both in primary and secondary schools. The reports stated that the content was minimal, teachers were not properly trained

and the methods relied upon were mainly rote and recall. Even with the introduction of the exam at Higher level in 1946, the status of the subject was low. History teachers were attached to an English Department. There was no separate History Department. It was not until the early 1960s that separate History Departments were created, along with a separate Head of Department post. A colleague of mine recalls that when he began his teaching career in the late 1950s, he worked under the Head of the English Department and in 1962 he became the first Head of a History Department in his school.

In 1962, a new O-Grade (Ordinary) exam was introduced for fourth year pupils and more youngsters could now take the exam. But it was not required and at the same time was competing with Geography and the new subjects which had been introduced in that year, Modern Studies and Economics. The introduction of Modern Studies in 1962 and its growth over the past thirty years has gradually weakened the status of History in the secondary schools. Today, Modern Studies is almost equal in terms of the numbers of pupils who take the exams and the History, Geography and Economics exams still exist, so that History is certainly not in a very strong position.

I hope over the next few years to concentrate on interviews with teachers in order to get an idea of what and how they taught, particularly in primary schools. At the same time I'll examine syllabi, textbooks and other supplementary material in order to find out just what was happening in the classroom, as best as one can.

A final comment, and an interesting one at that. As an expatriate living in Glasgow for twentythree years and now a committed Scots nationalist, one observation may be offered. Scotland may be the only country in the world, and certainly in Europe, which does not require its youngsters to study its History! Very little Scottish history is studied. Teachers know very little about it, that is both primary and secondary teachers, and even teachers of History in secondary schools are not required to have studied Scottish History at university. The same is true of Scots Literature. My wife is an English teacher and constantly fights a battle to emphasise and include Scottish Literature in the English syllabus in her school. My final thought is that I hope to be able, in several years, to return to this conference and provide the audience with a detailed picture of just how History was taught in Scotland since 1945.

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